Trials of missionaries

an address

by

Eli Smith.

BV
2075
.S6
1832

4.28.13

Library of the Theological Seminary

PRINCETON, N. J.

BV 2075 .S6 1832
Smith, Eli, 1801-1857.
Trials of missionaries

TRIALS OF MISSIONARIES.

LIBRARY OF PRINCETON
APR 28 1913
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

AN

ADDRESS

DELIVERED IN PARK-STREET CHURCH, BOSTON,

ON THE

EVENING OF OCTOBER 24, 1832,

TO THE

REV. ELIAS RIGGS, REV. WILLIAM M. THOMSON, AND DOCT. ASA DODGE,

ABOUT TO EMBARK AS

MISSIONARIES TO THE MEDITERRANEAN.

BY THE REV. ELI SMITH,
A MEMBER OF THE MISSION.

BOSTON:
PRINTED BY CROCKER AND BREWSTER,
47, Washington-street.
1832.

ADDRESS.

Dear Brethren,

This occasion brings fresh to remembrance my own emotions, when called more than six years ago, as you are now, to leave my friends and country. My first impressions and anxieties, too, at entering successively the scenes to which you are about to go, all come back renewed.

I am reminded of the misgiving-of-heart that assailed me, as the ship glided from the harbor, and boldly plunged into the Atlantic; seeming, while she unfeelingly tore me from home, presumptuously to defy the winds and waves to match their mighty power with human skill. I recollect my strange reluctance to credit my senses, when, at Malta, cowled monks, grated nunneries, images of saints at the corners of the streets and carried in pompous procession, priests in their confessional-boxes shriving the credulous penitent who knelt to whisper in their ear his confession, advertisements of indulgences at the doors of the churches, and the idolatrous worshiping of the host while carried through the streets as a viaticum to the dying; first changed all my dreams of the dark ages into

present realities, and showed me that I had got to fight over again, with the absurdities of popery, the battles of the Reformation. The involuntary dread, too, with which I shrunk from my first contact with the antichristian haughtiness of the turbaned Turk, as I landed in Egypt, a single-handed missionary, aiming to undermine the faith he adores, is distinctly recalled. And the near view of death presented by the plague, as I was first surrounded by it, and shut myself up from stranger and friend, fearing contagion in every touch, comes up afresh.

But what were first impressions once, have lost their novelty; and many of the anxieties they occasioned, have been entirely removed, or essentially modified by experience. Four times has Providence mercifully preserved me from the plague, while it was hurrying away its victims around; 'a thousand have fallen at my side and ten thousand at my right hand' from the cholera, and it has not been suffered to touch me; and when nigh unto death in a Persian stable, have friends been raised up to nurse and heal me. I have seen the wrath of the Turk restrained, when provoked by the destruction of his navy, and the approach of a conquering enemy to his capital; no serious molestation has been offered me while travelling thousands of miles in his territories; and even the predatory hand of the barbarous Kurd has not touched me. By observation and repeated argument, the open abominations and subtle wiles of papacy have become familiar. And after being preserved through a dozen voyages, I am mercifully returned to my country and friends.

I can never revisit those scenes, with the feelings I had at first entering them. Instead of imagined and imaginary trials, I now know, to a considerable extent, what to expect. Permit me, brethren, so far as I am able, to

transfer from my own mind to yours, some of the results of my experience.

The trials in regard to the necessaries of life, of which friends at home often think and speak most, you will probably regard least of all. Called, you often will be, especially in travelling, to eat, and clothe, and lodge badly; but still greater mental and moral privations will make you regard as trifles such as are merely bodily. The sight, too, of the numerous poor around you, eating their scanty meals of bread and oil, or filling their bellies with the pods of the kharoob tree, perhaps the very husks the prodigal son grudged the swine, and giving, by contrast, an appearance of comfort to every form of poverty you had seen before, will make you grateful, that, at the worst, you are enabled to fare better than they, and dispose you to forget your own wants in compassion for those whom you go to benefit. And you will remember your great Lord and Master, who, in his errand of mercy to our world, had not where to lay his head, and be ashamed to complain. Above all men, the missionary is called to apply to himself our Savior's injunction to his disciples, "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall *eat*, or what ye shall *drink*, nor yet for your body, what ye shall *put on*."

Among the trials which you will feel to be serious, I would mention, first, *the trial*, or perhaps I should say *disappointment, of your classical and sacred associations.* It is delightful to read the journals, or to listen to the narratives, of one who has surveyed the mountains and plains of Greece from the castle of Corinth, has examined the perfection of ancient art in the Parthenon at Athens, has become familiar with the glory of Lebanon and the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, and has stood upon

mount Olivet, or at the foot of mount Ararat. It is also interesting to anticipate going in person to such celebrated spots. And still more satisfactory is the reflection of having actually visited them. But the experience of really living and travelling there, is not, to the missionary, a cup of such unmixed gratification.—I say, *to the missionary*, because, in this and the other trials I shall mention, others can but very imperfectly sympathize with him. The *traveller* goes to look with the eye of an antiquarian or of a poet upon the relics of ancient art and power; or with that of a philosopher and a politician upon present exhibitions of character and of government. And if he lodges among poverty and filth in the ruins of Thebes or Baalbek; or is abused, hindered, and crossed in his purposes, by venial Turkish governors, and lying, faithless guides and muleteers; he is, indeed, discommoded, and vexed to the quick; but still the one serves materially, by way of contrast, to elevate his conceptions of the grandeur of ancient times, and the other teaches him constantly new and valuable lessons of the very information he is travelling to acquire. And he has neither the expectation of a continued residence among such people, nor any fixed desire for their happiness, to make their degradation weigh permanently upon his spirits.—Not so with you, as missionaries. You go not to study ancient Greece and Palestine, nor present workings of human nature; any farther than you will ever have an occasional regard to the one for the illustration of Scripture, and will find an understanding of the other an essential help to your missionary success. You go to reform and save the degenerate and perishing people who now dwell there; and your tour is for life. If this object be foremost, as it ought to be, in your minds and hearts, and you are led, when

lodging in a hut, the companion of filth and vermin, or daily cheated and belied by servants and false friends, sometimes to reflect upon the discouragements and disconsolateness of your work; what comfort, think you, will come from the idea, that you are on the spot where Socrates argued, or Paul preached? The very light, that will break in through such a reflection, will only make you see more clearly the foul features of the moral degradation around you, and feel more sensibly the extent of the labor you propose to accomplish. In a word, the misery of present scenes will diminish, and perhaps ultimately destroy the charms of classical and sacred associations. And, if your experience be like mine, the nearer you approach to Jerusalem, the less will be your desire to visit it; from the expectation of more pain from views of its present wickedness, than of pleasure from reflections upon its ancient glory.

Second: *Your constitutions will be tried.* Your fear of sudden death from the plague, will indeed be diminished, when you find that a perfect quarantine, or avoiding the touch of whatever has the contagion, will give you security in the midst of it. And you will find few places very subject to serious endemical diseases. The climate of the Mediterranean is not a bad one for that latitude. But it is still a southern climate. Three or four months of continued heat, with hardly a change of temperature which we should notice at home, and five or six months of drought, uninterrupted by a single shower, necessarily relax a constitution formed amid the invigorating changes and refreshing showers of our northern latitude. The nerves are then laid open to the withering action of the scirocco wind, which you will encounter every where, and they become a thermometer, exquisitely sensitive to every

varying breeze. More and more sensitive they become, too, as the process of enervation proceeds, to all the other trials of your missionary life. The spiritual blindness and obstinacy of those whom you would enlighten and convert, affects them. The universal falsehood of those with whom you deal, tries them. All the little inconveniences of food and lodging, too, then come to be felt, and prey upon them. The springs of animal life are gradually worn out, and the unnerved constitution falls an easy prey to disease, or sinks under premature old age. I speak not inconsiderately. It is my settled conviction that enfeebled health and shortened life are among the sacrifices necessary to the work of missions. They are an integral part of the expense to be reckoned in counting the cost of the conversion of the world. But, who that has a just sense of the value of souls and of the vanity of life, will shrink from them? Because the work cannot be done without them, shall it be left undone, the world be suffered to continue in ruin, and the Savior's command remain unobeyed?

Third: *Your courage will be tried.* Not, indeed, the courage requisite to face an enemy in combat, or death on the scaffold. The Turks are so kept in check by fear of the power and vengeance of Christian nations, that, where you go, your life will rarely, if ever, be endangered by their wrath. Your American citizenship will avail you as much as Paul's citizenship of Rome did him. It is your *moral* courage that will be tested. To preach the gospel at home, whether to congregations or to individuals, requires indeed a resolution that shall break through diffidence; but no great degree of positive courage, for the sentiments of the community are with you. But transfer yourself to a land of Mohammedans and papists, by one

of whom your religion is despised, and by the other is hated; a land, too, where delicate sensibilities are not regarded, but each one, tumbled and jostled by the rough handling of the heartless and the passionate from earliest youth, becomes as little sensitive to the treatment of another as the mule is to the lash of his master, and none is expected to feel short of a sound blow: stand up there to proclaim all out of the way, and to exhort them to renounce their hereditary veneration for the Koran and Councils, and all the thousand dogmas and ceremonies that hinge upon them; and receive the rough treatment to which they are accustomed, made rougher in proportion as you cross the current of public opinion and practice. Then will your moral courage be tried; and if it stand not the test, you will shrink back within yourself, and your influence as a missionary will be a cypher.

Fourth: *Your temper will be tried.* In your dealings with men, you will find them swayed by a selfishness so gross, as to overstep the bounds of honesty and of honor, within which it is commonly restrained among us. In its workings, man overreaches man to the best of his ability, and each, in managing his individual interests, acquires, in his little sphere, a diplomatic adroitness at intrigue, double-dealing, and deceit, not very unlike his, who has grown grey in the cabinet, managing the balance of power between neighboring nations. Your servant will hire shop-keepers and market-men to abet him in overcharging in his purchases, by dividing with them his dishonest gain; and then seek by cringing and falsehood to put your suspicions to rest. Your entertainer in travelling will serve you up more flattering speeches than nutricious dishes; and then charge you in proportion to the former, rather than the latter. So crookedly, in fact, are their

minds formed, that a falsehood will often come out as the readiest answer to a simple inquiry, when not the shadow of a motive appears for concealing the truth. *Their own* method of settling their matters is, to meet cheating with cheating and lie with lie; and then, by furious altercation and wrangling, work themselves to a mutual adjustment. Like as the inequalities of two flints are knocked off by collision; and in the one case as in the other, the more fire is elicited in the process, the more perfect, generally is the agreement in the end. *Your* way will be, to determine within yourself what is right, and then do it, regardless alike of their arguments, their smiles, and their threats. But who can steer this straight course through such vortices of falsehood and passion; and not have his temper warped, and be provoked to lift his voice and give utterance to his indignation? The occasions will occur daily, and if you yield to them, a touchy, impatient, dictatorial spirit, the reverse of evangelical meekness, will be the inevitable consequence. Such experience long continued will tend to cloud you in universal suspicion; and you will look upon all the world through the distorting medium of a sour misanthropy. I may seem to exaggerate the effects of little causes. But their very littleness, by enabling them to touch you in the bosom of your families, and in your every-day business, makes them the more irritating. And you must not be disappointed to find this far from being the least of your missionary trials.

Fifth: *Your wisdom will be tried.* To trace out even all the parts and bearings of papacy and the kindred religions, as theoretical systems of theology, requires thought and discrimination. But, in the shape which it gives to the minds of its professors, does the cunning of

"the master-piece of the prince of darkness" chiefly appear. And to adapt the means of conviction to such minds, calls for consummate wisdom. Without it, you may imagine yourselves wielding the most pungent arguments, when in fact every one strikes a spot shielded with adamant, and falls pointless to the ground. For papacy has left so few places undefended, that they are not to be hit by a random shot. They must be searched for and aimed at before the wound will be inflicted. Would you know where to touch the heart and conscience that they may feel? Wise experiment must teach you where they have not been hardened and blinded. Would you give the truth a shape that shall meet their exigency? You must study practically from observation, as well as theoretically from books, the highly artificial attitude in which their false religion has placed them. Your chief missionary business, in a word, of conveying truth to the minds of men, will be a constant test of your practical wisdom.—Your wisdom will be tried, too, in the common dealings of life. Men are not brought up in such a school of intrigue, as is the state of society in that part of the world, for nothing. A man's words being no index to his feelings or his intentions; they are forced to judge from other more unequivocal but less palpable symbols; and thus they become acute discerners of character. The missionary's character is soon studied; and before he is aware they have fathomed it, and found what they can, and what they cannot do with him. And if, in the trial, his common sense, the best of all worldly wisdom, be found wanting, he will be made the constant butt of their wily schemes.

Sixth: *Your piety will be tried;* in various respects. Its *activity* will be assayed. With how many stimulants, arising from close contact with brilliant examples, the

thrilling sight and reports of revivals of religion, and a spirit of restless enterprise and competition pervading a whole community, have you been goaded on here from every quarter to run well the race of christian zeal? These extraneous excitements will soon, in a great measure, cease to be felt; and your piety will be thrown upon its own internal springs of action to move it onward in its course of labor. Is there no danger that it will be found defective in the trial, and will leave you to flag, and stop, and settle down into the apathy and indolence of the dead mass of mind that will surround you?—Its *benevolence* will be tested. The great proof of our Savior's benevolence was its unmoved endurance of ingratitude, scorn and injury from those who were its objects. Similarly will yours be tried. The missionary goes not to the pleasant work of doing good to them who do good to him, and who deserve his esteem. Men, who daily cheat, curse and malign him, and in whom he can detect, perhaps, scarcely one estimable quality, are the characters for whose benefit he is to wear out his life. And absolutely essential to his usefulness is it, that his love to their souls have strength to overrule all the risings of provocation at their abuse, and of contempt at their meanness; and that, instead of suffering him to regard and treat them with the abhorrence their conduct deserves, it inspire him with increased compassion at every new exhibition of their turpitude. May your piety, brethren, prove, in the trial, to be of this heavenly stamp; and though injured, may you pity still, and still strive to save!—Its very *stability* will be closely assailed. How many supports has it hitherto had, from the stated ordinances of the house of God, from the social meeting for conference and prayer, from the interchange of experience and sympathies with Chris-

tian friends, from Sabbaths kept so strictly that all the circumstances of their return carry away your thoughts as on a current almost involuntarily to spiritual things, and from the floating opinions and feelings of a great religious community surrounding you as an atmosphere to be constantly inhaled for the renovation of the feelings that circulate in your heart? All these props are about to be knocked away, and your piety to be exposed to the serious trial of its ability to stand stable with little to lean upon, beside the immediate grace of God. To many oppressive weights, also, will it be subjected. Sabbaths profaned by labor or frivolous amusement in those whom you see, and by entire worldliness of mind in those with whom you converse, will tend to distract its spirituality. Constant familiarity with moral corruption, brought nigh by the conduct of those with whom you have to do, and, by its very touch, almost contaminating your heart and giving callousness to your conscience, will tend to adulterate its holiness. To its other burdens, the prince of darkness will add the weight of his influence. The existence and influence of Satan is no Jewish fable. In his wide dominion, he has his more and his less loyal provinces. The missionary goes to raise the standard of revolt where he reigns lord paramount of all. And can he expect to encounter no more than his ordinary stratagems and assaults? I am not dealing in figures for the sake of impression. I seriously believe you will have to contend with more of Satan's wiles in your own personal experience, than if you remained here, where his supremacy has been partially renounced. Under all these trials of its stability, brethren, may your piety prove not to be a parasitic plant, that shall droop and fall! But, rooted in the soil of a regenerate heart, and watered by showers of

divine grace, may it, like a stable oak, stand unbent by them all!

Finally: *Your faith will be tried.* The devout Martyn, in anticipation of the missionary life, said, "in seasons of unbelief, nothing seems to lie before me but one vast uninteresting wilderness, and heaven appearing but dimly at the end." Similar feelings will your circumstances often occasion you. When removed from so many of the present sources of religious enjoyment, your resort will be to the anticipation by faith of the enjoyments of heaven. If your faith prove weak, your goal will be dim, and your course dark. But if it be like that of the patriarch, who, while he lived as a pilgrim and a stranger, looked for a city that hath foundations whose builder and maker is God, your hopes will be bright, and your path as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.—Your work will add to the trial of your faith. *Here* there is so much of sight in the encouragements of a preacher of the gospel, that he is liable to forget to call in the aid of faith. While he ploughs and sows, he sees the showers descend, and the seed spring up and bear fruit, with so much regularity as to be tempted to regard the process with feelings differing little from those of the husbandman, when he looks upon the progress of his yearly crops. But you go to a dry and thirsty land, where no showers have descended for centuries; and as you clear away the rocks, and sow the seed, not a little faith is required to expect that the heavens will again be opened to water it, and to make it bring forth fruit in its season. To look with confidence to the means you will use for the conversion of men, ignorant of every image of piety, brought up in the full belief of ingenious and captivating error, and corrupted in conscience and in heart, till the

one ceases to recognize the truth and the other to brook control, is the height of faith in God. Men of the world have it not; they stand not this trial of the missionary, and at once give up the work as hopeless. But to the eye of that, which is "the evidence of things not seen," it is not hopeless; for it discerns, applied to the simple machinery, the power of the Hand that moves the world. Such, we trust, brethren, will your faith prove to be, making you ever regard, with unshaken confidence, the promise of God to stand as sure in Asia as in America. And while you labor in the regions once evangelized by Paul, you will look as steadfastly as he did, not to miracles, nor to wisdom, but to the foolishness of preaching the cross of Christ, for the salvation of them that believe.

Having added up so many items of the cost, I ought now to estimate also the value of the prize. In other words, to this enumeration of your trials I ought to add, for a counterpoise, a view of your pleasures and prospects. But I have not time to enlarge.

Your satisfaction will be unalloyed and ennobling, in feeling that you have thrown yourselves into a position perfectly congruous to all your true relations to time and eternity; by selecting an employment, that sinks to their deserved rank of trifles the affairs of the body and of time, by neglecting them; and exalts to their proper magnitude the affairs of the soul and of eternity, by looking to them for its objects and its pleasures.—Sublime is the feeling and glorious the prospect of enlisting as officers in the great army that is to complete what the Savior bled on the cross and now sits upon the throne of the universe to accomplish, the subjection of the whole world to his will. You go indeed to a post of labor and fatigue; and, as you besiege the citadels of the beast and of the false

prophet, whose conquest is to complete the triumph of the Lamb, the struggle may be hard and long. But, when crowned with the laurels of victory, how trifling will all your present trials appear !—Unspeakable will be your pleasure, leaving, as you do, this fold guarded by so many faithful shepherds, and going to gather the sheep that are scattered upon the mountains, when you succeed in bringing back one and another that was lost, and participate in the joy of the angels of God at his recovery.—The consolations of divine grace, too, if you continue faithful, will be meeted out to you according to your day, and you will find them neither few nor small.

And, my christian friends of this congregation, may I not add, among other pleasures of missionaries, sympathy, encouragement and prayers from the churches at home. You surely will not chill their hearts by the ungenerous insinuation, that when they beg the means to be sent abroad they are pleading for personal favors. For to whom can it be a personal favor, to be banished from the comforts of home and the privileges of our favored land, and to wear out life in the midst of such, and unnumbered other similar trials? Nor will you, (may I not say?) wait for them to write or come home to stir up your interest and your zeal in their cause. This order of things ought to be reversed. *You* are at the centre, the heart of the system of evangelical action; *missionaries* at the distant extremities. From you the current of life should be propelled warm and rapid; from them it can be expected to return only at a cold and languid rate. You ought to take them by the hand and lead them onward, imparting to them renewed portions of your zeal and faith.

These brethren will find others in the field, who, years ago, went out from you, and have since been bearing the

burden and heat of the day. Might I speak of my own recollections, I would tell you how often I have taken sweet counsel with them. But you yourselves know their worth. Let the vessel, now about to leave, go freighted with your warmest sympathies and your sincerest prayers for them, as well as for those who will sail in her.

I need not add, dear brethren now about to depart, an expression of my own fullest sympathy in the trials and the prospects of yourselves and of them. I hope soon to join you, and, by spending and being spent with you, share, not only in your feelings, but in your labors.

Date Due

JUN 15 1992
JUN 15 1992
JUN 15 1993
JUN 15 1994
JUN 15 1995

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library
1 1012 01093 3275